

Boston INFORMER

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Theater District W Hotel

Parcel C-4 Development – It's been a parking lot as long as most people can remember. The lot at the corner of Tremont, Stuart and Warrenton streets next to the Shubert Theater in the Theater District is finally being developed. Construction is underway on a 235-room Starwood W Hotel, 123 condominiums, ground-floor retail and 142 underground parking spaces. The developer, Sawyer Enterprises, estimates construction will be done in summer 2009.

Under the theory that surface parking lots are meant to be interim uses, revenue-generators until the rate of return on a building is greater than that of a parking lot, the length of time this parcel has been a parking lot challenges the definition of the term "interim." Parking has been one of the main uses on this parcel for close to 50 years.

The history of the Sawyer parcel goes back to the 1965 South Cove Urban Renewal Plan, which extended from Hudson Street in Chinatown to Clarendon Street in Back Bay, and from Marginal Road to Stuart/Kneeland. The Sawyer parcel, Parcel C-4, is on the very edge of the South Cove Urban Renewal Area and is adjacent to the Park Plaza Urban Renewal District and Central Business Urban Renewal Plan. Parcel C-4 is also in the Midtown Cultural District zoning district—the parcel has been part of a larger set of plans for the area.

Urban renewal was to "replace the deteriorating buildings

and outdated land uses," the Boston Redevelopment Authority's (BRA) 1970s Fact Sheet says, realign/eliminate streets (Carver Street and Broadway were eliminated), and Stuart and Charles Street So. were widened.

Tufts-New England Medical Center development, State Transportation Building and ultimately the Four Seasons Hotel and Heritage condominiums were built between 1967 and 1989. The Midtown Cultural District planning tackled a bunch of the remaining parcels, including C-4.

A 1986 internal BRA document suggested a major new retail magnet, a "bazaar" oriented to design arts and folk arts, a park and glass-covered public space with restaurants and cafes, a 200-seat theater and cabaret facing Warrenton Street, upper-floor office and possible hotel use and underground parking. A study of the major development sites throughout the Midtown Cultural District by Skidmore Owings and Merrill in 1987 covered the area from West Street to Oak Street to Arlington Street to the Boston Common, proposed a 325-foot hotel/office tower on C-4 with two 199-seat experimental theaters along with two smaller alternatives. The Midtown Cultural District's 1989 "Plan to Manage Growth" and any plans for C-4 were stalled by the recession of 1990.

In 1998, Sawyer Enterprises filed a Project Notification Form with the BRA in December 1999 for a 390-room Loew's Hotel. An Urban Renewal U Overlay District was established at the site, essentially subsuming zoning to land disposition agreements made under the urban renewal plan. The project

was approved by the Zoning Commission in August 2001, only to be stopped by the recession that followed the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Three years later in 2004, the project was revived as a hotel-condominium project with a new hotel operator, Starwood.



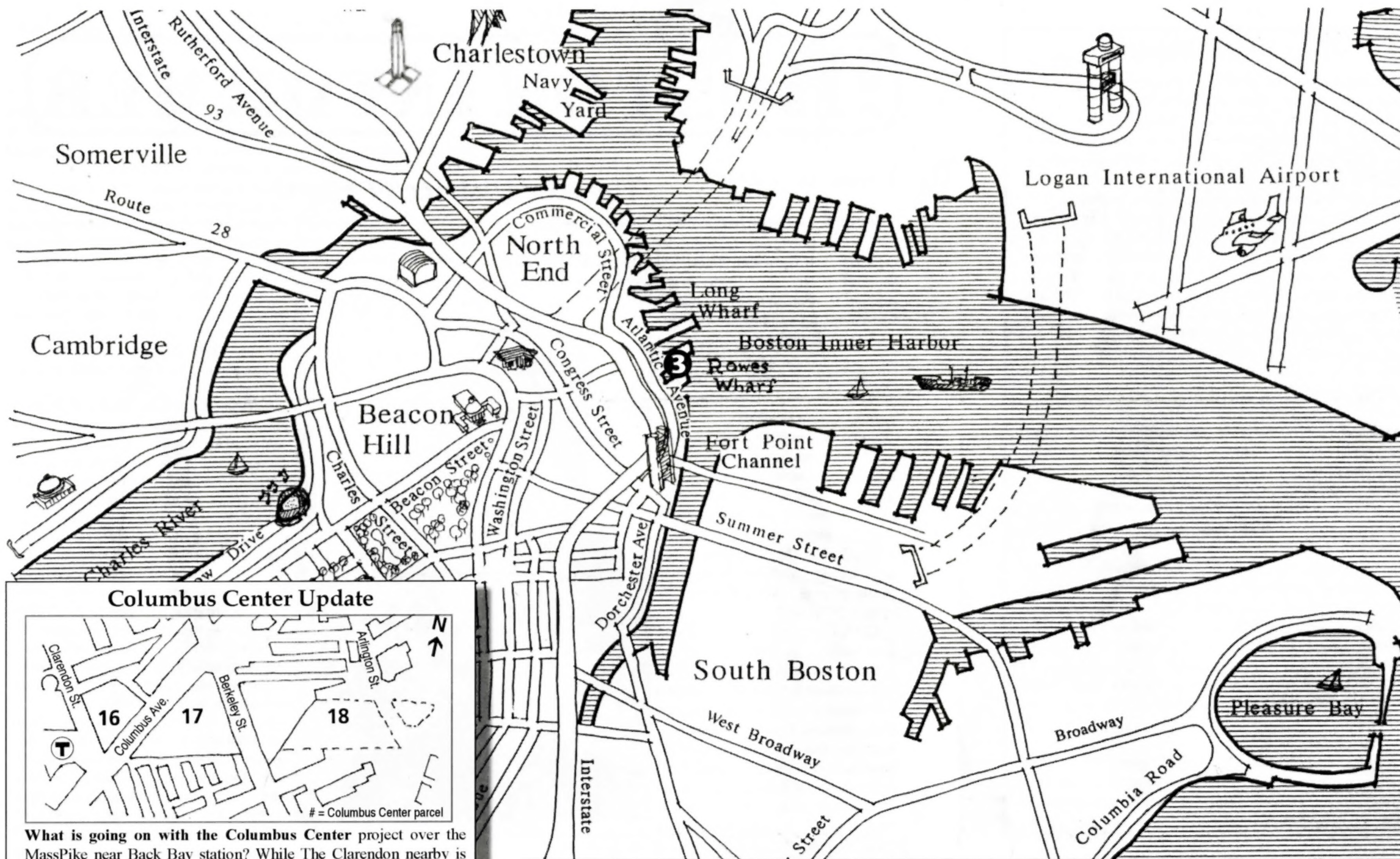
Source: William Rawl & TRO Jung Brannen/Sawyer Enterprises

Bridges of Boston – Two important Charles River bridges, **Boston University Bridge** and **Longfellow Bridge**, are in need of major renovation. A third the **Zakim Bridge**, has defects that are being assessed. Renovation of the B.U. Bridge, owned by Mass. Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) is at 50% design with no construction start date. Short-term repairs are already being done on the Longfellow Bridge as part of a 40-day engineering assessment. The Longfellow is owned by DCR, but all repair and rehabilitation work is being designed and done by MassHighway. The five-year, \$200 million project is planned to start in 2010. Similarly, the **Craigie Drawbridge** at the Museum of Science dam just began the design process with DCR; MassHighway will bid the rehabilitation project.

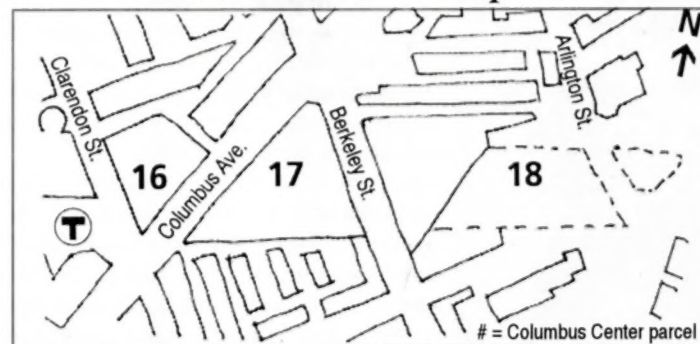
The five-year-old Zakim Bridge (MassHighway) has six warped

steel anchor plates and is being inspected for other possible problems. Shortly before the bridge opened an area of faulty concrete was discovered and repaired. The **No. Washington Street Bridge**, owned by the City, has been restricted to two lanes in each direction for several years because of structural problems. No date for renovation or rebuilding has been set.

MassHighway and DCR are struggling with whether to repair, rebuild or eliminate the seriously deteriorated Back Bay **Storrow Drive eastbound tunnel**. At issue are the costs, duration and traffic rerouting for the alternatives. A longer-term problem is persistent water leakage in the **O'Neill Central Artery tunnels** which will lead to accelerated corrosion of the steel roof supports. The current remedy seems to be continual grouting of the new and recurring leaks; this method costs about \$5 million per year.



Columbus Center Update



What is going on with the Columbus Center project over the MassPike near Back Bay station? While The Clarendon nearby is going ahead rapidly, Columbus Center, a 1.3 million-s.f. residential and hotel project, seems mired in controversy and dissension.

- ◆Project costs have soared from \$400 million to \$800 million
- ◆The Winn Companies Web site says the project will be open in 2008, yet construction hasn't begun
- ◆According to the South End News, which is keeping track of the saga, Winn Companies sold the equity in the property to the California state pension plan (CalPERS and CUIP), via an investment firm, McFarlane Urban Realty Co.
- ◆The US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is looking into how the city's Empowerment Zone—which targets low-income areas—was expanded to include the air-rights project
- ◆\$20 million in low-interest loans awarded by MassHousing, a quasi-public agency, did not meet agency guidelines. The loans usually are not given to condominiums; instead, MassHousing targets the loans to affordable rental units.
- ◆Public funds for the project include a \$10 million MORE grant, \$36 million loan from HUD, \$32 million tax-exempt loan—and Winn is seeking \$10 million more.

Hard to say where the project is headed. Stay tuned.

Digging Deeper:

Follow-up to The Boston Informer 15th Anniversary Big Dig Report: 3 Questions for Chan Rogers

"A single conversation across a table with a wise man is worth a month's study of books." Chinese proverb

Today's topic: Big Dig Cost-Control Efforts

Chan Rogers, P.E., a retired civil engineer, worked on the Big Dig for 10 years.

TBI: It seems like the state was slow to start to focus on Big Dig cost control. Is that true? When did the state begin to really focus on costs?

CR: They started looking at project costs early as 1993 when Mike Lewis became chief engineer for MHD and Peter Zuk was project director.

TBI: What did you see as the reason costs seem to spiral out of control?

CR: In my view, the pressures of the project schedule hampered attempts to control costs. The "need" to meet deadlines and push

the schedule made it hard to control costs. Contractors worked to meet the schedule and charged for doing so.

TBI: So how did they cut costs? Did they simplify the design or just use cheaper paint, so to speak?

CR: Both, apparently. I personally knew of well-informed decisions to save serious money by eliminating C-D (collector-distributor) roads in the Fort Point Channel tunnels and transferring their functions to So. Boston roads and ramps. Saved \$300 million. And there were unfortunate cuts, too, such as architectural treatment of vent buildings, tunnel finishes, and tragically, the ceiling panel system in the tunnel. Many appropriate cost-cutting decisions were made by professionals throughout the project. Some were just unfortunate losses and some were worse.

What's Up?

After the recent astonishing admission by a MassPike spokesman that MassPike didn't know when the entire **Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway** would be finished and open to the public, the Chinatown Park was formally opened on Sept. 12, 2007. The northern North End parcel 10 and Wharf District parcel 14 will be open in the next few weeks. The official opening of the whole Greenway is scheduled for fall 2008.

Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Ian Bowles ruled on a challenge to MassPike's controversial designation of parcel 13 (near Christopher Columbus Park) to be an Armenian Memorial Park. Bowles said MassPike ignored the prescribed public process and must comply with the established process now. The process has just now begun. Recently the chain-link fence around part of the parcel was removed and the parcel was planted with grass. Also, the offer is still open from the Greenway Conservancy to build a temporary park until a final design is chosen.

On parcel 6, a reduced plan for a YMCA facility in the North End was revived after MassPike received \$15 million from the state to help build a platform over the Central Artery tunnel ramps. YMCA hired Tishman Construction Corp. of Massachusetts as project manager, hoping MassPike would start work on the platform in 2008. YMCA Construction will take 18–14 months. No dates yet for construction of the New Center for Arts and Culture (parcel 18, opposite Rowes Wharf) or the Boston Museum (parcel 17 in the North End).

In the Theater District: In addition to construction starting on the W Hotel on a former parking lot (see front page), the 25-year-old Hub Ticket trailer has been removed to make way for construction of a 155-foot glass-clad curved building with two floors of restaurant, 12 floors of condominiums and huge exterior neon signs (residents will need dark curtains). Developers are Amherst Media Investors LLC and Abbott Real Estate.

The 93-year-old charming and historic Wilbur Theater is for sale by owner Tremont Entertainment Enterprises after unsuccessful leasing attempts. The Wilbur was given landmark status in 1987, complicating possible development. The BRA still plans to create a sidewalk "Walk of Fame" honoring past and present Bostonians. However, it will be delayed at least two years until nearby construction is finished and sidewalks rebuilt. To start, the Walk of Fame will be in front of theaters along both sides of Tremont Street. It may later expand to the Opera House on Washington Street and Colonial Theater on Boylston Street.

3 Harbor Garage on Atlantic Avenue, a massive 1,380-car garage on seven levels plus two basement levels, is for sale by owner/operator InterPark.

The site is a complex development site for a number of reasons. The adjacent condominium complex Harbor Towers has a permanent easement for its boilers and cooling tower in the garage and over 10 years remain on leases for 400 parking spaces for residents. About 50 percent of paying New England Aquarium visitors park in the garage, and there is no comparable garage nearby. If Aquarium parking is interrupted for several years by construction, the Aquarium could be forced to close.

PEOPLE MOVERS

Laurie Burt, from Foley Hoag to commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection.

Peter C. Calcaterra, former MBTA and Executive Office of Transportation planner, has retired.

Geoff Slater, from Edwards and Kelcey to Nelson\Nygaard consultants.

Michael F. Galvin, formerly of Bank of America, to Boston Redevelopment Authority deputy director for institutional development.

Paul MacMillan, from deputy MBTA Transit Police chief to acting MBTA Transit Police chief.

Gary Talbot, from Walt Disney to MBTA asst. general manager for system-wide accessibility.

Paul Reville, from Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy to head of the State Board of Education.

Welcome to The Boston Informer

The goal is simple: provide concise public information on construction projects, planning initiatives, and whatever else affects living and working in Boston. Welcome to The Boston Informer!

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Bridges across the Charles River are in bad shape (see front page)...



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The Boston Informer helpfully offers some river-crossing alternatives for when the bridges are under construction.

You Were Asking

- Q. What is the status of the MBTA project to connect the Blue Line and Red Line at Charles/MGH?**
- A.** Included as a Central Artery/Tunnel transit commitment, the commitment has been watered down to require only that the state design the \$260 million, half-mile connector project by 2011. Construction is not mandated. The Executive Office of Transportation was expected to issue an Environmental Notification Form in July or Sept. 10, but nothing has been filed.
- Q. Ring Road has been closed and Boylston Street is reduced to two travel lanes and things work just fine! I heard the Pru—it owns Ring Road—and the City are considering making this arrangement permanent, with buses and Ducks allowed on Ring Road.**
- A.** You really have your ear to the ground! We couldn't find anyone to confirm this rumor, but it sounds reasonable!
- Q. Now that the grates on major highways have been welded shut because of recent accidents with loose grates, how are the catch basins underneath going to be cleaned?**
- A.** We think ahead only one step at time.
- Q. What is happening at East Boston's Pier 1? The building was torn down some time ago, but I see nothing rising in its place.**
- A.** Massport, owners of the waterfront land, and Roseland Development, have been updating the community about the status of the development. Roseland is looking at a different development scenario and sequence, but many issues about Cashman Marine and the Phase II Piers Park have not been resolved.
- Q. Kenmore station and Kenmore Square have been under construction for years. When will it be done?**
- A.** Almost a year behind schedule, the project involves raising Green Line platforms for low-floor trains, a new bus canopy, elevators, escalators and streetscape/traffic improvements. The canopy will be done this fall, but the escalators, elevators and sidewalk/roadway work probably won't be done until 2008.

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TIME TO RENEW

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